DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 052 UD 024 322

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TITLE The Role of the School in the Maintenance and Change of Ethnic Group Affiliations.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 21p.; Print is light.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; Bilingual Education; Cultural Differences; Educational Environment; *Ethnicity; High Schools; Immigrants; *Limited English Speaking; *Portuguese Americans; Racial Relations; Student Attitudes; *Student School Relationship; Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

The public schools play a major role in the Americanization of foreign-born students. This process gives rise to questions regarding the meanings attached to ethnic identity and the effect that the schools have on the formulation and change of these meanings. To examine these issues, 18 Portuguese immigrant students in an urban New England school were studied to determine whether there were differences in manifestations of ethnic identity in various settings. Comparisons were made between 8 "recent" immigrants (in the United States for less than 2 years) and 10 early arrivals (here from 6-16 years). Additionally, both the school's official policy and actual practices (including teacher attitudes) vis-a-vis limited English proficient (LEP) students, were examined. In a general sense, it was found, the 18 students lived in two cultures, one at home and the other at school. Instead of helping them adapt to their bicultural reality, the school tried to negate the students' Portuguese culture while at the same time discouraging acceptance into the American culture, this being demonstrated in the differences between the earlier and more recent arrivals. To survive in the school, the earlier arrivals were forced to negate some of their home attachments and establish an identity apart from the low-status Portuguese. Even so, they were not completely successful: sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, and the school's lack of sensitivity to their needs all stood in the way of their attaining a fully equal education. (KH)

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The Role of the School in the Maintenance and Change of Ethnic Group Affiliations

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The Role of the School in the Maintenance and Change of Ethnic Group Affiliation

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As one of society's principal socializing agents, the public schools play a major role in the Americanization of foreign-born students. This process gives rise to questions regarding the meanings attached to ethnic identity and the effect that the schools have on the formulation and change of these meanings.

To study these issues, I conducted research which focused on eighteen Portuguese immigrant students enrolled in an urban New England high school to determine whether there were differences in their manifestations of ethnic identity in various settings. Comparisons were made between eight recent immigrants who have been in the United States for less than two years, and ten early arrivals who had been here from 6 - 16 years.

Ethnic identity was defined through structural and cultural/symbolic aspects. (See Keefe, 1980) Structural ethnicity was seen in terms of group boundaries, i.e. inter-group conflicts and interactions, socio-economic status, inter-marriage, participation in the political process, etc. To assess cultural/symbolic ethnicity, I examined student values, material culture, self-identification, attachments to cultural symbols and linguistic markers, feelings of pride and positive affiliation or inferiority and discrimination. Relationships to authority figures were given particular attention for their potential illumination of differences between Anglo and Portuguese values.

Like most urban high schools, East High School, the site of my 1982-83 research, is a complex social institution with both implicit and explicit or formal policies vis-a-vis its limited English proficient (LEP) populations. Explicit or formal policies are designed to govern the decision making process for both administrators and teachers by defining appropriate standards, procedures and programs. They have the approval of of the School Board.

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With curriculum guides, subject area requirements and policy manuals carrying the official imprimatur of the school district, implicit policies develop in counterpoint to these formal ones. These implicit policies can be determined through an examination of teacher and administration attitudes and expectations as revealed through student placements, special program offerings, parent communications and classroom practices. In order to understand the dynamic between East High School's explicit and implicit policies for LEP students, both the official doctrine and the actual practices were examined.

The official doctrine was revealed through the district's Procedures Manual for Limited English Proficient students. This document represented the only School Board approved policy relative to the foreign born student population. In part, the Manual stated that the School Department was "committed philosophically and financially" (P.8)

1) to native language instruction
2) to parental involvement in their children's educational program and
3) to a "better understanding among ethnic groups" in the nation and the world (P.8)

The Manual further described the immediate objectives of the high school bilingual program through "vernacular instruction in mathematics, social studies and science...through vocationally oriented...curriculum offerings, to reduce dropout rate(s)...and through retention of and respect for the mother culture, while becoming familiarized to and assimilating American culture." (P.24) The Manual also encouraged broadening the awareness of American students to other languages and cultures.

Investigation into the implementation of these written policies revealed that no math, science or vocational training was offered in Portuguese. Only three hours a week of social studies was given in the vernacular. Ironically, the Portuguese language arts class was scheduled in conflict with beginning ESL so no recent arrivals could enroll. These students, in fact, received virtually no conceptual development in their native language.

In addition, while the Procedures Manual and other School Board documents referred to the availability of individual student counseling in all the City's high schools, only one of the guidance counselors was able to speak Portuguese and he was only permitted to work with ninth graders. All the other Portuguese students, therefore, received no counseling services.

Similarly, even though the Procedures Manual discussed parental involvement, notices to parents were seldom sent home in Portuguese. Contact between the school and the home remained virtually non-existent.

While cross-cultural understanding was an explicit district-wide goal, no special in-service program was offered to either the staff or student body at the high school. Likewise, increased awareness of other languages and cultures was viewed as desirous by the School Board, but Portuguese was not offered as a foreign language in any of the high schools; neither was there a Portuguese cultural component to any other district-wide program or activity. When explicit policies were compared with actual program implementation, it became apparent that despite claims to the contrary, there was no Portuguese bilingual program in the high school.

While these discrepancies were quite revealing, it was teacher expectations and behaviors that served as the most serious contradiction to those written policies which proclaimed system-wide goals of cultural pluralism and "better understanding among ethnic groups."

Teacher attitudes and behavior reflected stereotypes of the Portuguese student as intellectually inferior, non-educationally oriented, socially backward, and marginal to American values of success, assimilation and upward mobility. The teachers expressed feelings of alienation from these students and frustration over their own inability to effect change. The teachers' desire that students be obedient and respectful promoted favoritism toward specific groups, e.g. Southeast Asians, who represented no threat to the stability of the classroom but still expressed an interest in academic achievement.

The Portuguese, on the other hand, while frequently docile (particularly the girls), were not seen as intellectually motivated. The faculty's actions reflected attitudes that the Portuguese students would not do well academically and were, therefore, not worth spending too much time with. As one teacher stated, "The Portuguese kids will probably drop out of school, anyway." Little, if any, attempt was made to understand the cultural difference between the school and the home or to reach parents and disabuse them of their unsupportive attitudes about education.

When the teachers' feelings about the Portuguese were examined closely, many revealed patterns of racism, ethnocentrism and cultural superiority. Cynicism and helplessness in the face of overwhelming cultural determination pervaded the school. There was definite resistence to cultural diversity, an attitude which ran counter to explicit school dpeartment policies toward multicultural understanding and ethnic pluralism.

In many ways, the teachers' expectations echoed American education policies circa 1920 regarding Anglo conformity and melting pot ideology. Ironically, this occurred at a time when the school system had publicly adopted cultural pluralism as an educational goal. The implicit policies, as reflected in teacher attitudes, became implemented through preferential treatment to other groups and self-fulfilling prophesies for poor Portu-

guese student performance.

In order to better understand the teachers' reactions to the Portuguese students, knowledge of both the teachers' ethnic background and that of the Portuguese immigrant is necessary. Most of the teachers at the high school were second and third generation Italian, Irish and Jewish immigrants. The almost 1000 member student body, however, were 40% black, 21% Anglo, 15% Portuguese, 10% Hispanic, 8% S.E. Asian, and 6% Cape Verdean and other groups.

Landes (1976) has suggested that first and second generation American teachers, because of the insecurity of their newly converted status "strive to invalidate a divergent one" by being highly judgmental, critical and visibly disturbed by the presence of other minority groups in the school. (P.401)

This was not true for the black students, who constituted the most prestigious group in the school. As one of the Portuguese students in the study noted, "The teachers all like the black kids best."

By hanging around with black students, others established themselves as part of the school's most popular in-group. The guidance counselor confirmed this by saying "The blacks rule the school. There are more of them. They dance in the cafeteria and the hallways. They're more outgoing. They're performers. There's no question that they are the most popular kids. They also cause the most disturbances." The Portuguese, however, did not readily mix with blacks. As described by Almeida (1980), the Portuguese are deeply religious, submissive, pacific, orderly and family oriented. They transmit to their children a world view calling for adherence to a hard-work ethic.

The Portuguese come from a tradition of little formal education, of the highest illiteracy rate in Europe, of strong sexual role divisions, and of over 50 years of fascist dictatorships. There are over half a million

Portuguese in New England, the majority of whom are from the Azores Islands, an archipelago located about 900 miles from the European continent. Despite the fact that most of these Portuguese immigrants had never seen blacks on the islands, many brought an anti-black prejudice with them. Fear of blacks was a pre-adaptation, conditioned in large part by the subservient status of blacks in Africa under the Portuguese colonial empire. It also reflected a combination of anxiety toward the unknown and reactions to tales told by returning Portuguese immigrants.

Consequently, the expectations of both their American peers and their teachers contrasted sharply with those of the students' parents. While parents cautioned against association with blacks, in the school, blacks represented the most dominant and sought-after group. Similarly, in the home, students were respectful, obedient and well-disciplined, particularly the girls. These values, when transferred to the school, carried low esteem. In East High School, the defiant, raucous, academically indifferent student was admired. As Turner indicates in his 1983 study of the social world of the high school, getting into trouble signifies masculinity and confers prestige rather than shame. By openly defying a teacher, a student obtained instant admiration and respect.

The Portuguese boys learned earlier than the girls to socialize outside the home. The skills acquired from meeting friends of their fathers or from relatively unrestricted forays into the community enabled them to adjust better than the girls to the diverse student body of the high school. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the school, the boys were more gregarious and had more Anglo friends than the girls.

Their teachers and peers, however, made it clear that being Portuguese was not a mark of social esteem. As indicated, the Portuguese language was not offered as an elective along with Spanish, French and Italian. Recent Portuguese immigrants were segregated from mainstream

classes: Portuguese parents were not involved in the school. The majority of guidance counselors not only couldn't speak Portuguese but frequently mispronounced Portuguese names. Similarly, truant officers never followed up on Portuguese student latenesses or absences.

The faculty had re-interpreted Portuguese cultural concepts so that they now appeared undesirable. Values of hard work became viewed as anti-intellectural and non-educationally oriented. Close Portuguese family ties were seen as exclusionary and anti-assimilationist. Respect for authority was equated with docility and subservience. Protection of females was sexist and discriminatory. Fear of blacks was racist. Non-political involvement was un-American and so on. In this way, teacher attitudes and the resulting low expectations they had for Portuguese student achievement identified and separated the Portuguese as a distinct ethnic group within the high school.

The recent Portuguese arrivals were not nearly as sensitive to this as the early arrivals. The early arrivals were keenly aware of the various forms of rejection to their ethnic heritage. One student said that she resented the fact that "Americans look down on the Portuguese." Another commented that "I get mad because I don't want people to make fun of me."

The early Portuguese arrivals observed the preferential treatment accorded other groups and interpreted this behavior as rejection of them. Under these circumstances, remaining in school seemed less attractive, a factor that accounted in large part for the Portuguese having the highest dropout rate in the high school - more than half of them didn't remain to graduate.

Characteristically, the early arrivals disassociated themselves

from the recent immigrants. "We already paid our dues" was how one early arrival described this separation; "They'll learn how to get along on their own, just like we did." was another comment.

Without exception, the early student arrivals exhibited little sympathy for the recent immigrant. This was attributable, in large measure, to their own conflicting attitudes about their Portuguese heritage. These ethnic divisions were even further magnified by the fact that the Portuguese bilingual teacher was from continental Portugal and she, too, felt a linguistic and cultural superiority over the lower status Azorean students.

Aspects of the early students' ethnic identity revealed an ambivalence stemming, in part, from ethnic pride nurtured in the home and ethnic rejection as reflected in the implicit policies of the high school. Structural manifestations of ethnicity in the school were evidenced through intergroup relations. Even though the boys mingled with Anglos to a much greater extent than the girls, especially in Gym and in the halls, barriers were still evident between the Anglos and Portuguese. Students remained separate in their classes, in the cafeteria, walking to and from school and generally between classes as well. These boundaries also existed between the recent and early arrivals.

A cultural/symbolic analysis revealed that the early arrivals adopted English as the language of the school, dressed, ate and listened to music like their Anglo counterparts.

At home the early arrivals expressed strong feelings of pride and positive affiliation with the Portuguese, but in the school they exhibited negative feelings of inferiority and shame. It was, in fact, these feelings that prompted many of their other school-related

behavior, e.g. speaking only English, avoiding the recent arrivals, using Anglicized versions of their names, and becoming bolder with their teachers. This last change in their relationship to authority figures was more evident among the boys.

None of the recent arrivals had any Anglo friends, either in their neighborhood or in their classes. Group boundaries, as revealed through their inter-group relations, followed a pattern of almost total exclusivity. The greatest barrier for them was linguistic. The recent arrivals could not effectively communicate in English, thereby cutting off any significant relationships with non-Portuguese speakers. This further accounted for the fact that the recent arrivals were conspicuously quiet in most of their classes. They remained well behaved and obedient, rarely cutting classes and never answering their teachers disrespectfully.

More than the early arrivals, the recent immigrants sat together, walked to and from school together, ate together and formed friendships. Boys and girls usually remained in separate groups and only occasionally interacted. There was, however, greater contact between the recent girls and boys in the school than between recent and early students of the same sex. In the home/community environment, however, there was greater recent and early student interaction, particularly at church and folk festivals and for male related street sports. Unlike the early arrivals, all the recent arrivals expressed pride in their Portuguese heritage both at home and in school. They also expressed a mixture of fear and disdain for American permissiveness with regard to dating, inter-racial relationships, and lack of respect for teachers and parents. The recent arrivals further pointed with dismay to the cavalier attitudes that Anglo students had about poor academic performance and personal behavior. Almost all the recent arrivals recount-

ed stories of the shock they first experienced upon entering the high school.

By contrast, one early arrival spoke about his "Portuguese blood" at home, but identified himself as an American in school. Another early arrival told her father about colleagues who denied their Portuguese background; yet she refused to answer to her Portuguese name in the school, responding only to the Anglicized version. One boy deliberately sought association with non-Portuguese in school. In fact, all but one early arrival identified themselves as Anglo in the school setting.

Because most of the early arrivals demonstrated feelings of inferiority about the Portuguese in the school setting, they often refused to acknowledge that they understood the Portuguese language. One boy went so far as to use only English even in his Portuguese social studies class. Others admitted feeling shame when Anglos talked about Portuguese customs. Another student described the Anglos as being smarter than the Portuguese. The teachers, in fact, expressed surprise to learn that the early arrivals knew Portuguese because they never heard them use the language in school.

Despite student denials of their Portuguese background, most teachers were aware that the early arrivals were indeed Portuguese. While teachers mispronounced their names and underestimated their abilities, they were aware of their presence as a distinct sub-group of the school. At home, by contrast, the early arrivals not only spoke Portuguese almost exclusively, but pointed with pride to their Portuguese heritage. The prolonged exposure to the school's negative attitude about the Portuguese, conveyed by teacher and student alike, had resulted in attempts by the early arrivals to distance themselves from any association with the Portuguese language or culture.

Despite this, total assimilation into the Anglo group was prevented by the Anglo students' unwillingness to accept the Portuguese and by the teachers' continued labelling of the early arrivals as Portuguese. As Braroe (1975) noted, frequent contact between groups does not necessarily erase stereotypes or remove boundaries.

The effects of implicit educational policies on the ethnic group became detrimental to the maintenance of ethnic identity in the school. While change in the cultural/symbolic aspects of ethnicity preceded the dissolution of structural barriers, assimilation of the ethnic group was simultaneously encouraged and thwarted by the educational hierarchy. Students continued to be regarded as Portuguese long after they'd chosen to identify themselves as Anglos. Because acceptance by Anglos was neither immediate nor total, group members still associated with each other, further increasing their identification with the ethnic group.

The eighteen students in this study lived in two cultures, both of which were important to their survival. Instead of assisting them in adapting to their bi-cultural reality, the school was, instead, trying to negate one of these cultures, the Portuguese, while, at the same time, discouraging acceptance into the other, the American. Ironically, the bilingual program if appropriately implemented could have helped the students bridge this gap.

Rejection of the ethnic group by the school was neither blatant nor conspiratorial. It was, perhaps, all the more insidious because the school faculty was acting out of the best of intentions -- a desire to see the students become Americanized as quicky as possible. The result, however, was that students were renouncing their Portuguese ethnicity without being accepted as Americans. In a school strongly characterized by ethnic affiliations, the early Portuguese arrivals remained marginal.

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The fact that the school's implicit policies served as the trigger for this behavior is significant. If the school were not implicitly sanctioning the inferiority of the Portuguese, early students would not be as eager to disassociate themselves from their heritage and more recently arrived counterparts. Because many of their home values were unacceptable to the Anglo school majority, the early Portuguese students quickly lost their sense of ethnic pride. This loss also affected their school performance, as numerous studies on self-concept and academic achievement attest. (see e.g. Becker, 1980, Cook, 1972, Dimitroff, 1972) Failing grades further militated for early school dropout. Because ethnic identification was situationally selected, the early arrivals, most particularly the boys, opted for Anglo identification in the school.

Much of the literature on situational ethnicity focuses on adults who had both physically and psychologically segregated their environments (see e.g. Nagata, 1974, Mitchell, 1969, Mayer, 1962, and Gluckman, 1961). This is very different from these students' circumstances. They lived in both worlds simultaneously.

While other adult-focused research records the <u>results</u> of situational ethnic selection, this study observed the <u>process</u>. Through a series of trials and errors, students were testing the parameters of ethnic accomodation and change, but they had not yet resolved many of the conflicts inherent in the process. They were not always able to successfully employ situational ethnic stragegies to mediate between the disparities of their home and school cultures.

The parents' own limited education and tradition of non-political involvement, coupled with a lack of contact with the high school reinforced many of the attitudes held by the teachers. Convinced that the

Portuguese didn't care about their children's education, teachers perpetuated stereotypes of the Portuguese which contributed to their continued position at the lower end of the education hierarchy. By showing favoritism to the more popular black students or the more studious Southeast Asians, the teachers confirmed these attitudes about the Portuguese.

To survive in East High School, the Portuguese students were forced to negate some of their home attachments and establish an identity apart from low-status Portuguese. This necessitated playing different roles in the home and the school so as to obtain acceptance in both.

But, the early arrivals were not completely successful at making the transformation in the school. Strong Portuguese sex-role expectations persisted as did other attitudes and behaviors inimical to acceptance by Anglo students and teachers. What emerged, instead, was a distinctly Portuguese-American identity, not totally acceptable to either group, yet not completely rejected by them either.

The Portuguese student entered the public school with feelings of ethnic pride and left with notions of cultural inferiority and shame. They usually arrived both respectful and obedient but often left defiant and inattentive. Most Portuguese started their public school careers with little faith in the power of education to redress social inequities. Unfortunately, they dropped out of school with the same conviction.

The school was socializing the Portuguese immigrant, only they were being socialized into an environment that was often hostile to their very existence as a group. Ironically, this hostility may eventually serve to create a new solidarity among the early arrivals, one which revives and transforms Portuguese ethnicity into what Bell (1975) calls a strategic choice.

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If the school rejects Portuguese ethnicity while the home celebrates it, then the strategic choice made by the early arrivals is not an either/or choice, i.e. either identify as Portuguese or as Anglo. Rather, these ethnic choices become contingent on optimizing the advantages of being associated with one group in one context and with another group in another context. It becomes just as important to minimize the disadvantages of identification with the less desirable group as it is to increase the advantages of association with the more desirable one. In this case, it was clearly more advantageous to be identified as Portuguese in the home and community and as Anglo in the school.

The early arrivals were in the process of transforming their Portuguese ethnicity in the high school through the incorporation of structural and cultural/symbolic features of Anglo ethnicity with aspects of Portuguese ethnicity. The result was a school-based ethnic identity that was neither Anglo nor Portuguese, but a combination of the two. The early arrivals in the high school interacted with Anglos, dressed and ate like Anglos, but didn't socialize with them. They were more respectful than the Anglos. They called themselves Anglo but were classified by students and teachers alike as Portuguese. They had neither melted nor retained their cultural heritage. In the school setting, this ethnic limbo was seen by the early arrivals as preferable to being identified as Portuguese. Although they would rather be identified as Anglos, they were not able to do so.

Situational ethnic selection enabled the early arrivals to maintain the structural and cultural/symbolic aspects of Portuguese ethnicity in their home while adapting to aspects of Anglo ethnicity in the school. These attitudinal and behavioral changes in the school were a direct response to the school's implicit educational policies.

The school's role in shaping the ethnic identity of these immigrant students was both significant and invested with far reaching social implications. The ambiguity of the public schools' response to the socialization of its LEP populations reflects a larger ideological tug of war being played out by the American people. While the numerous legislative initiatives that mandate bilingual education all recognize cultural pluralism as a goal of contemporary society, Anglo conformity and melting pot ideologies persist through implicit policies that undermine effective bilingual program implementation. The immigrant student is caught in the crossfire, bring subjected to programs designed to fail and teachers who anticipate the results. Among this population, the public schools were clearly not a vehicle for upward mobility.

Because this study dealt with a small number of students in only one school, future research is needed to determine whether there is wider applicability of these findings to other communities and other ethnic groups. If it is found to be systematically evident that explicit educational policies tout cultural pluralism while implicit pratices do not, then school districts need to address questions regarding their own enforcement of written school board dictates. If cultural pluralism is, in fact, viewed as a goal of the district, then why are widespread counterproductive implicit practices allowed to flourish? How in effect can the school district redress the inequities that result from disparities between goals and practices? The existence of linguistic and cultural barriers that prevent foreign speaking parents from gaining access to the public schools, cuts them off from the realities of their new environment. This creates not only a gap between the parent and the

school, but between the parent and the child as well. The student's choice becomes one of either rejecting the values of the home or the values of the school. While accomodation can be made to select those ethnic behaviors least dissonant with the social context, it is not possible to believe in the importance of education in the school setting and reject its significance at home. Either you remain to graduate or you don't. The high Portuguese student dropout rate in New England attests to the fact that in this clash between home and school, the home was most often victorious.

It is not unrealistic to require school systems to establish programs that meet the needs of their various immigrant communities. The school has both a moral and legal obligation to provide equal educational opportunities to all its students. This encompasses communicating with the parent as well as with the child. There is overwhelming evidence of the high correlations between parental involvement in the school and student achievement. (see Fantini and Cárdenas, 1980) By not having notices printed in the native language, or counselors to speak to parents, or truancy officers to contact families, or specially designed programs that address the differences between American and native country educational practices, the public schools are, in effect, denying LEP parents an equal access to public education.

The issues raised by the role of the schools in ethnic maintenance and change are highly controversial, not because they call into question particular methodologies or program effectiveness, but because they challenge the very ideological foundation upon which American public education is built. To paraphrase Gordon (1964), do we want Anglo conformity, melting pot or cultural pluralism? And, what are the broader social implications of adopting any one of these conceptual models? Is this nation of immigrants interested in preserving its

ethnic diversity or annihilating it?

While our laws speak to equality of opportunity, our experience reveals an inequality of results. If the public schools are part of the problem, can they also be expected to be part of the solution?

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